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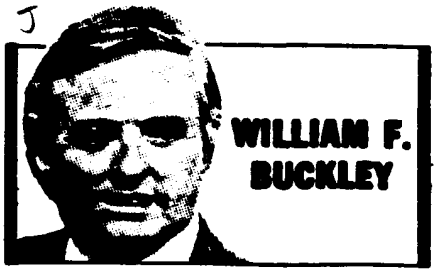
# Cato updated: Delenda est Khadafy




AN OBVIOUSLY discouraged American ambassador said at his press conference after visiting the West German Foreign Office: "It is a matter of doing what is right." And of course it is right to do something about Khadafy, not perhaps everything we can do, but everything we can reasonably do, which is to put a heavy accent on defining what is reasonable.

Helmut Kohl, who is certainly pro-American, almost pleaded, in turn, for American understanding. Don't you see, he said, there are 1,500 West Germans working in Libya, and we have to watch out for them. And several billion dollars of trade with Libya. "Sometimes West German interests," he said—which he was pledged to serve—"don't coincide with U.S. interests." Right. That was certainly true of Germany for a couple of years back in 1917, and for four years beginning in 1941.

It is not a claim to diplomatic savoir faire on behalf of America to comment that the elder statesmanship of Europe has led to two great wars, to the enslavement of Eastern Europe, and to an impasse in the Mideast in which innocent Europeans and Americans are used as pincushions by terrorists whose emerging spokesman is that modern Caligula who presides over Libya.

So should our attitude toward Libya be Catonic? That useful word is used to remind us that Cato the Elder, perceiving Carthage to be a great strategic threat to Rome, ended all his orations with the declamation, Delenda est Carthago: Carthage must be destroyed. And was it ever—by contrast, the bombing of Dresden was a tea party. But the destruction of Libya is not the objective, rather the destruction of its leader, and this is not easy to effect.

Which brings us to the extraordinary performance of Sen. Howard Metzenbaum, whose ambition, one must suppose on surveying his career, is to be wrong on absolutely every issue he addresses. Old Metz pops up and says that perhaps we ought to consider ordering the assassination of Khadafy. If indeed he is guilty of terrorism, perhaps the CIA—which by the way would not exist if Metzenbaum's votes were decisive in matters relating to the CIA—should have him eliminated.

Responsible government officials don't talk about the assassination of foreign leaders. This does not mean that circumstances do not exist in which the assassination of a world leader isn't called for, merely that this is the kind of thing that, preferably forever, is kept silent. Metzenbaum would do well to keep silent on every subject, but if he can handle discretion on only one, let him start by being silent on commissioning the death of foreign leaders.

Khadafy's ultimate threat reaches for hilarity. He threatens the U.S. to become another Castro Cuba, concerning which one observes only that there isn't that much of a difference between life in Libya and Cuba save that Khadafy does exercise a measure of independence from Moscow that Castro does not. Threatening to give up all of his independence to spite America is, in an adult, well, kook talk; like a child threatening his mother to stop eating candy.

Most noticeable about the whole drama is not so much European reluctance to act as the consolidation of sentiment throughout the Islamic world around Khadafy. The implied meaning of it being that any country that assails an Islamic country serves to unify all Islamic countries around that country, no matter what its provocations.

IT IS THE counterpart of the African states that 10 years ago elevated Idi Amin as their hero because he was disowned by the U.S. and Great Britain. Do you remember the efforts of the State Department to rally the sentiment of the Islamic world to protest the actions of the ayatollah when he took our hostages? It is a hell of a way to promote a religion.

Reagan has taken it on the chin, but just wait. If Libya tranquilizes, it will be because of the U.S. threat. If it does not, Europe will be reminded of what Reagan warned of, back then on Jan. 7, 1986, and perhaps the shadow of Cato will pass over their chancelleries.

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